1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934-
SRS Bush Negroes SRS
Saramacca

REBEL DESTINY

6

Fa'aku was chief of his clan. He was a handsome man, with a quick, clever eye, and a reputation for great honesty everywhere on the river. To him we appealed for more light on kunu. We had met him in his village on our way upstream and we had seen him in the tribal council house when we had sat at the great krutu held there by Granman Yankuso. When we stopped again at Fa'aku's village on our way down the river—this village that was so close to Dahomey, the seat of magic—it was evident that the gods favored us. We had come safely through the great rapids. We had stayed at Asindopo Lantiwe in good health, and the spirits had even spoken for us through some of the women whom they had possessed. Fa'aku spoke with greater freedom than we had yet met with.

"There are different kinds of kunu, and some are big and are very bad; but some are small and do not make much trouble," he began.

The greatest kunu came from making a child with a member of one's own family, with one's true, true sister or, what would be almost as bad, with a child of one's mother's sister. Murder was a great kunu, too, and perhaps next to that was the kunu that came to the Bush Negro if he informed to the white man against one of his own kind. Then there were the kunu that one got for false accusation, and for repeated stealing, and even for lying, if it were done too much. For lying is not good, lying makes too much trouble among people. And there were many more kinds of kunu, some of which he mentioned. Killing a snake or a tiger and not burying it with honor brought on a kunu, and cutting down a silk-cotton tree was kunu.

When a big kunu came into a family, it wiped it out. One by one the members of the family died. Men died, women died, and children were never born, or they died when they were small. "This goes on until the family is finished," Fa'aku said. A lesser kunu could kill as well, but its vengeance would be directed only against the women who carried on the line of succession to office and property, or

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we found that for the krutu to act as a jury was an important part of its work. The krutu not only saw to the making of law, but it was also the medium for levying penalties upon those who transgressed law. The same krutu that legislated could judge infractions of its legislation. In its hands was the power to enforce the decisions it had made against the offender. 623 693

We had wondered whether, in this Suriname bush, the African court which so characterized the civilization of the ancestors of these people had survived. When we heard of the supernatural vengeance which followed upon infractions of custom, we sought to find out if people took the matter of punishment into their own hands, if kunu was reinforced by human assistance. 623 693 681

"Ai, mati," a chief once said to us, "kunu is strong, but the krutu is strong, too."

If a man had sworn an oath against another, had called down upon another a curse of some evil spirit, or asked that the gods make a man impotent, or that they stop the womb of his wife from conceiving, or if a man murdered by means other than witchcraft, then he was judged by a krutu. A man who had destroyed a canoe belonging to another—a serious offense, for, as the Bush Negro says, "Had our forefathers not had the wisdom to build canoes, we would still be slaves to the Bak'a"—he, too, would come before this court. The adulterer would be brought here for the assessment of his fine. [683] [685] [684]

When the krutu sat as a court, the accused was not without the right of defense. If it were thieving, or adultery, or the telling of falsehoods, or trespass, or the destruction of the property of another, where the kunu involved was not of the greatest, then the case was judged on the basis of the evidence. In the court, the interests of the one who was accused were cared for by one of the elders of his *mbe*, his relative and a fellow member of his own great family. But when the crime was one of the greater ones, then methods other than the sole use of testimony were employed. Evidence was necessary, but evidence was not 623 695

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
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gaining possession of other fugitives. It is said that, until recently, actual war prevailed among the tribes because some Saramaccaners invaded the Boni and Aucaner districts, poaching on their lumbering, hunting, fishing, and balata rights. The punishment today for any Bush Negro found poaching in another district is a healthy beating with canoe paddles and fists, after which he is warned not to repeat the offence.

With the Indians of Surinam the Bush Negroes have little commerce or intercourse. These aborigines belong principally to three American tribes, the Carib, Acaway, and Arawak. They and the Djukas mutually look down on each other, but in our opinion the latter are intellectually the superior. Indian and Djuka villages are separate; very little trading occurs between them. On the Marowyne, Tapanahoni, and Lawa Rivers, however, the Negroes occupy a strategic position on the middle rivers, so that Indians from their remote villages along the upper river must pass by Bush Negro towns on their way downstream to trade at the white settlement of Albina, near the mouth of the Marowyne. The Djukas tell the Indians that the white men in Albina practise cannibalism. Rather than run the risk of trading with cannibals, the Indians barter their stuff in the Bush Negro towns. By this crafty arrangement, the Negroes obtain bead and feather work in exchange for tobacco and for machetes.

The Indians on the other rivers do not share this superstition concerning the white man's cannibalism. None of the Indian tribes mingle with the Djukas other than for the pur-

2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
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and pageantry. Now it is only a name. But the name has been 778
carried overseas to the South American bush, and persists
there long after its origin has been forgotten.

As has already been noted, the villages are universally 364
clean and sanitary. There is no filth or debris scattered about.
The garbage is disposed of by being thrown into the river
at a point below the village. A small amount of it is fed to
the chickens, which we found in practically every Bush
Negro village. Feces are disposed of in small outhouses made
of leaves placed on bypaths some four hundred yards from
the village clearing. When these become seriously polluted,
they are removed to another location. Some villages have no
outhouses.

Bathing is indulged in frequently by all of the Bush Ne- 515
groes. There are few who do not bathe in the river two or
three times a day. No bodily odour could be detected on
them, except one of perspiration, when the men poled their
canoes for long distances and did not have time to bathe at
their accustomed hours.

Sometimes as a punishment a woman may be condemned 681
to act as scavenger for the village for as long as two years;
it is then her duty to be continually cleaning up the village.

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
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● 68/ It is incumbent upon the captain who convicted her to supply her with food throughout the entire period of her punishment. Sometimes an entire family is condemned to clean the village of the Granman for a longer or shorter time, according to the crime committed. If they refuse to accept their punishment, the culprits have the alternative of being placed in the white man's jail, but such cases are few.

682 /8 cont./
[672] culprit is condemned to find the requital in his offspring. His
[567] children, children's children, and great-grandchildren must render slave services for the family of the person poisoned.

692 Moreover, they usually act in accordance with the judgment and the decision of their elders or council members. Most punish-
• 681 ments consist of whip lashes.

Chapter IV

Weapons

411 These consist of rifles, machetes, bow and arrow, and lances.
278 In some cases they also use a kind of cudgel (1). The most dangerous
682

1. An Indian weapon called apoetoe.

one that they possess, however, is an assortment of vegetable poisons with which they can secretly strike their enemies and whose effects manifest themselves slowly, but are usually lethal. They not only mix these with one food or another, or in snuff or tobacco, but in the case of some can merely bring them in contact with a part of the body and thereby produce to the most infectious results.

/9/

Chapter V

Dwellings, Practices, Customs, Housekeeping

342 Their huts are constructed low above the ground from un-
824 worked round wood, covered with pina, the leaves of a palm species (1), and surrounded by palisade pales.

1. Euterpe oleracea Mart.

352 The couches and sleeping places within are also made of paling.

354 Inside the hut is found the hearth or place for the fire, on
372 which they cook and in which they constantly maintain a fire for

/18 cont./

966 787 times, no noticeable movement has been observed, the answer is negative, and one proceeds with the corpse all the way to the end of the crowd ranged on either side. Everyone endeavors to be present on such occasions in order not to cast any blame upon himself or to arouse suspicion.

If, however, the answer is in the affirmative, then one asks whether the right person or a close relative of his is here; if the answer to this is also affirmative, one proceeds to inquire about the degree of blood relationship until one has finally discovered who the actual person is. Since this happens in the presence of so many persons as witnesses, it is regarded as valid proof, and the corpse is buried. However incomprehensible and impossible this may appear, this procedure is nonetheless actually practiced constantly among the Bush Negroes. I have been an eyewitness several times. [123]

695 [693] A few days later the person indicated, in case he was not present at the above-mentioned inquiry, is tracked down, if necessary fetched forcibly, and brought before the governor or the chief, who questions him in the presence of the captains or the council members. In case of denial, he is offered something to drink, which, however, he will not accept if he is guilty, since it has become apparent that whoever drinks it with a pounding or uneasy heart frequently manifests immediate symptoms, such as vomiting, swelling, chlorosis, and so forth. If the person has been prepared to brave this (in spite of the conviction of his misdeed), he is put to death by means of the most horrible and unheard-of tortures, whereas in the case of confession he is forced with the whip to reveal whom else he has poisoned during his life. [691]

696 682 All the relatives of the poisoned person are then called in order to be present at the punishment and to pull on his ears with all possible force by means of a pair of pincers, one after another. Subsequently a bowl with pinda blaf is set before him, in which a turtle must be boiled, as well as a tomtom made of ripe bananas. All this, after all, is regarded as the tastiest food. He is then /19/ again severely beaten with a whip, whereupon he must eat what has been prepared for him, and immediately afterwards [262]

/19 cont.

696 he must sit unbound on a large fire arranged in gridiron fashion,
682 so that he burns completely to ashes.

[695] Never, however, is an accused put to death before three months have elapsed after the inquiry, because there still might possibly be a chance that his innocence will be proved.

682 In the case of a confession and the supplying of clear proof
[695] that the deceased gave cause to be poisoned, the culprit frequently
[672] escapes with a light punishment; sometimes also forgiveness is granted with general approval, with the condition that the culprit take upon himself to the third generation the obligation to be of service in everything to the descendants of the maltreated person.

681 It may also happen that in the case of various other misdeeds the
672 perpetrator is completely forgiven for his misdeed, but that upon his descendants to the third generation there is imposed the obligation to render slave services exactly as in the case of poisoning.

681 The majority of these slave services ordinarily consist of giving money, strong drink, or the necessities of life, as a result of which hard work must often be done in order to be able to fulfill them. Every day they are afraid that this or that may be exacted from them. There are indications, however, that not too great a misuse is made of this.

765 Twelve months after the burial there always takes place a great gathering in the hut of the deceased, at which time the period of mourning ends with rejoicing. Exuberant festivities are then celebrated, and that night an unusually great amount is drunk, eaten, and honor salutes fired. Everyone in the vicinity, insofar as he is able, is present on this occasion.

This festival is called tesa, the ending of the mourning period, and begins after one of the nearest relatives, who enjoys the greatest respect, takes a large calabash filled with water in his right hand and with it slowly walks forth out of the hut along the other dwellings nearby and is followed by a large number of people, during which he here and there sprinkles the water,
[775] nowéwatra, in drops on the ground, saying: Like this water, the soul of the deceased will also be pure, and all that was dear to him will remain tranquilly on earth without being disturbed by him who as spirit finds himself in the spirit world.

/o8 cont./

613 624 [562] The basia are the mouthpieces of the captain, and not at all deputies having specific authority over a definite fraction of the village. There are three or four per village; in addition there are one or two women basia through whom the village head commands the work reserved for the women.

613 554 241 282 The head of the lineage possesses no religious power over the land. The Refugee Blacks assume that the fertility of the soil depends exclusively on local divinities, to whom each one prays on his own behalf.

613 554 491 The captain, no more than the council, does not have the right to expel a member from the lineage, even for marked unworthiness. This is one of the most remarkable aspects of the legal conceptions of the Refugee Blacks, tied to the idea that a lineage represents only one single life. There again the thought of the Refugee Blacks can be regarded as the extreme opposite of the thought of the Bamiléké, with whom the head alone retains possession of the rights over the land, expulsion constituting the supreme social sanction.

881 Initiation; age classes; men's society. These African institutions seem totally unknown to the Refugee Blacks. No form of initiation of adolescents exists, and no ceremony marks collectively their entrance into social life. Circumcision and excision are not practiced. For the children, boys and girls, there are two stages: that of the first garment, which is given upon the appearance of the pubic hair, at about 12-13 years, without ceremony, and the end of education which coincides with marriage.

[304] [852] [56] 561 The society of the Refugee Blacks rests however in large part on age hierarchy; strictly speaking there are no age classes involving a fixed organization, but they exist tacitly:

/72 cont./

643 778 241 The grand man acts as land head for the whole of the tribe. It is he who has the care of the sanctuary of mama gɔ̃ and who prays each year in the presence of a large gathering of people for the fertility of the soil.

643 793 796 782 The grand man is the priest of Odun, divinity whom the Boni regard as avenger of offenses against moral and religious law; by virtue of this, he alone is qualified to administer the oath against wʃi (sorcery) and to implore the mercy of Odun toward those who have gone against his laws by fighting with arms.

643 156 In his religious functions this usually weak and unobtrusive man acts with sovereign authority and assurance, and we have several times seen people tremble before him.

643 681 [673] If someone has seriously transgressed the customary laws, or if he has stolen, committed adultery, given blows, poured forth serious insults or curses, the grand man inflicts on him punishment proportional to the gravity of the offense, such as making planks, /73/ a boat, pounding rice (if it is a woman). The product of the punishment is acquired by the grand man, as are the fines in money which he imposes in less serious cases.

643 685 For example in October, 1952, two adolescents of Boniville, Awétipay and Adyuka, were surprised while they were trying to break into an inhabited house; the grand man sentenced them forthwith to three days of forced labor, in the course of which he made them clean the approaches to the village and collect for his benefit wood for heating.

643 689 462 He can also punish disobedient or disrespectful young men by making them do work reserved for women, such as weeding the approaches to the village and the removal of dog droppings.

643 681 The grand man can confine a man to Boni villages by forbidding him to go beyond l'Enfant Perdu to the north and Kormotibo to the south; that is called sitafu sama (sitafu = captive). The man concerned, deprived of means of earning his living, thus becomes dependent on his family until he makes honorable amends.